

Description

ADJUSTABLE CHAIR

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to chairs having a height adjustment. It finds particular application in conjunction with bathing chairs and will be described with particular reference thereto. It will be appreciated, however, that the invention is also amenable to other applications.

[0002] Adjustable chairs are useful for assisting disabled persons while bathing. Depending on the type and/or severity of the disability, a person may prefer or have no choice but to sit while bathing. In this case, it is desirable to use a chair having a seat easily adjustable to various heights. Furthermore, because the terrain of the bathing area (e.g., a tub or shower) may be uneven, it is also desirable that the legs be independently adjustable to accommodate even slight irregularities in the surface of the bathing area while ensuring that the seat is level (e.g., parallel to the ground).

[0003] One conventional chair used for assisting disabled per-

sons while bathing includes a leg having an upper portion secured to an underside of a seat. A continuously threaded section extends from the upper portion of the leg. A lower portion of the leg includes a hollow cavity with continuous threads that mate with the threaded section of the upper portion. The threaded section of the upper portion is screwed into the cavity of the lower portion until a desired height of the seat is attained. Furthermore, the height of the seat is adjusted by turning (e.g., screwing and/or unscrewing) the threaded section of the upper portion to a new position within the cavity.

[0004] Although the mating threads on the respective portions of the legs provide a means for adjusting a height of the seat, no means for indexing the height of the legs and/or comparing the height of one leg of the chair with respect to any of the other legs is provided. Therefore, assembling the chair to sit on a relatively flat surface requires a trial-by-error approach whereby a user makes a first attempt at adjusting the legs to achieve a level seat. Then, the user places the chair on the ground and makes the necessary adjustments to the heights of the respective legs until the seat is level and, furthermore, the desired height of the seat is achieved. Obviously, this multi-step

process of leveling the seat at a desired height is cumbersome.

- [0005] Furthermore, conventional bathing chairs having independently attachable legs do not offer desired levels of stability.
- [0006] Also, the seat portions of conventional bathing seats are not curved in a way that creates a perception of a more accommodating seat.
- [0007] The present invention provides a new and improved apparatus and method which addresses the above-referenced problems.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

- [0008] In one embodiment, an adjustable leg for a chair includes a leg housing, secured to a seat, that includes a threaded inner wall. A leg extension is received into the leg housing and includes external threaded portions that mate with the threaded inner wall. A tab in the leg housing cooperates with the external threaded portions and secures the leg extension at a predefined position in the leg housing.
- [0009] In another embodiment, an adjustable leg for a chair includes a leg housing secured to a seat. An insert is secured in the leg housing and includes a threaded inner wall. A leg extension is received into the insert and in-

cludes external threaded portions that mate with the threaded inner wall. A depression is defined between the threaded portions. A tab on the insert cooperates with the threaded portions and the depression. The leg extension is secured at a predefined position in the insert when the tab is in the depression.

- [0010] In another embodiment, a chair has an adjustable leg. The leg includes an upper leg portion secured to a seat. An insert is secured in the upper leg portion and includes a threaded inner wall. A lower leg portion is received in the insert and includes a partial external threaded portion, which mates with the threaded inner wall, and a valley. A means provides visual and tactile feedback to a user when the lower leg portion is at a predetermined position in the upper leg portion.
- [0011] In another embodiment, an adjustable leg for a chair includes a leg housing secured to a seat. A leg extension is received into the housing and includes external threaded portions that mate with a threaded inner wall of the leg housing. A plurality of indices are between the threaded portions on the leg extension. A locking mechanism is associated with the leg housing. Preset positions of the leg extension within the housing are determined as a function

of respective ones of the indices being engaged with the locking mechanism.

[0012] In another embodiment, a method for adjusting a leg of a chair includes rotating a leg extension within an insert that is secured within a leg housing. External threaded portions of the leg extension mate with a threaded inner wall of the insert as the leg extension is rotated. When the leg extension is at a predefined position in the insert, a tab on an inner surface of the insert engages in a valley between the threaded portions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0013] In the accompanying drawings which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, embodiments of the invention are illustrated, which, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed description given below, serve to exemplify the embodiments of this invention.

[0014] *FIGURE 1* illustrates an exploded view of a chair in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0015] *FIGURE 2* illustrates a top of the seat portion in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] *FIGURE 3* illustrates a bottom of the seat portion in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

- [0017] *FIGURES 4–17* illustrate various cross-sectional views through the bottom of the seat portion in *FIGURE 3*;
- [0018] *FIGURE 18* illustrates an exploded view of a leg housing, an insert, and a leg extension in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0019] *FIGURE 19* illustrates a sectional view of the insert in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0020] *FIGURE 20* illustrates the leg insert in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0021] *FIGURE 21* illustrates another embodiment of the present invention; and
- [0022] *FIGURE 22* illustrates another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- [0023] With reference to *FIGURE 1*, a chair 10 according to the present invention includes a seat portion 12, a back portion 14, and a plurality of leg housings 16a, 16b, 16c, 16d secured to the seat portion 12. Although four (4) leg housings 16a, 16b, 16c, 16d are shown in the illustrated embodiment, it is to be understood that other numbers of leg housings are also contemplated. A plurality of leg extensions 20a, 20b, 20c, 20d are received in respective inserts 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, which are secured in the leg housings

16a, 16b, 16c, 16d.

- [0024] With reference to *FIGURE 2*, a top portion 22 of the seat portion 12 includes a plurality of holes 24 for providing drainage. A plurality (e.g., two (2)) of hand grips 26a, 26b are also provided.
- [0025] With reference to *FIGURE 3*, a bottom portion 30 of the seat portion 12 includes a plurality of housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d, which are designed to mate with an upper portion 34a (see *FIGURE 16*) of the leg housing 16a (see *FIGURE 18*). *FIGURES 4–7* illustrate cross-sectional views of the housing receiving portion 32a. *FIGURES 8–11* illustrate cross-sectional views of the housing receiving portion 32b. *FIGURES 12 and 13* illustrate cross-sectional views of the housing receiving portion 32c. *FIGURES 14 and 15* illustrate cross-sectional views of the housing receiving portion 32d.
- [0026] With reference again to *FIGURE 3*, each of the housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d is a pocket having a triangular lobe geometry. Each of the pockets is deep enough (e.g., at least about 2.0 inches deep) for providing adequate contact area between the housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d and the respective leg housings 16a, 16b, 16c, 16d to increase lateral stability. Furthermore, the

ocket design of the housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d provides for easy interchangeability between various leg extensions 20a, 20b, 20c, 20d (see *FIGURE 1*) (e.g., leg extensions made from different materials such as composite materials and/or metals including aluminum).

[0027] *FIGURES 16 and 17* illustrate cross-sectional views through the seat portion 12. A seating surface 33 of the seat portion 12 is dished in such a fashion that a center 33a of the seating surface 33 is lower than an outer edge 33b of the seating surface 33. Also, a depth 35 (front to back) of the seating surface 33 area is less than a width 37 (side to side) of the seating surface 33 area. The gradual radius and seating surface proportions provides a smooth and comfortable surface that cradles the user. In one embodiment, the center 33a of the seating surface 33 is lower than the outer edge 33b by about 0.875 inches, the depth 35 is about 75% of the width 37, and the dished surface is radius at about 60 inches; however, other embodiments, which include other dimensions, are also contemplated.

[0028] *FIGURE 18* illustrates a perspective view of the leg housing 16a, the insert 18a, the leg extension 20a, and a tip portion 36a, which is secured to a bottom of the insert 18a. The top portion 34a includes locking tabs (one of which is il-

lustrated as 40a and one of which is not shown). The locking tabs 40a cooperate with openings 42a1, 42a2 (see FIGURES 3-5) in the respective housing receiving portion 32a (without the use of tools) to secure the leg housing 16a to the housing receiving portion 32a. The locking tabs 40a are biased in an outward direction from the housing receiving portion 32a to facilitate engagement in the openings 42a1, 42a2. In the illustrated embodiment, the locking tabs 40a are of a sufficient length and positioned on substantially opposite sides of the top portion 34a for facilitating disengagement of the top portion 34a from the housing receiving portion 32a when a user merely uses a single hand for performing the disengagement. In one embodiment, the tip portion 36a is a non-skid material (e.g., a material that may be injection molded as a soft substance such as rubber or Sarlink from DSM, Inc.) that improves traction with a ground surface.

[0029] In the illustrated embodiment, the insert 18a includes a plurality (e.g., two (2)) portions 18a1, 18a2. Each of the portions 18a1, 18a2 includes an internally threaded wall portion 44a1, 44a2. Furthermore, one of the portions 44a2 includes a flexing portion 46 (see FIGURE 19) and a tab 50 (see FIGURE 19) (locking device or mechanism) on the inner

wall. In one embodiment, the tab 50 includes a well (recessed portion), which is defined by walls of the flexing portion 46. The portions 18a1, 18a2 are assembled together to form the insert 18. When the portions 18a1, 18a2 are secured together, the internally threaded wall portions cooperate to form a continuous internally threaded wall on the insert 18. Also, the tab 50 is biased toward a center of the insert 18 by the flexing portion 46. The insert 18a is frictionally secured in a cavity at the bottom end of the leg housing 16a.

[0030] With reference to *FIGURE 20*, the leg extension 20a includes a plurality (e.g., two (2)) of external threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 and a plurality of indicators 54 (indices), which are positioned along a longitudinal axis of the leg extension 20a and between the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2. The threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 are raised with respect to a remainder of the portion 56 (e.g., valley or depression) between the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2. In one embodiment, the indicators 54 are also raised with respect to the portion 56. The threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 of the leg extension 20a are sized for mating with the internally threaded wall of the insert 18a (see *FIGURE 18*). Therefore, the leg extension 20a is drawn into (or extended from) the

insert 18a (see *FIGURE 18*) and the leg housing 16a (see *FIGURE 18*) as the leg extension 20a is rotated. The leg extension 20a also includes a collar 58, which abuts the insert 18 (see *FIGURE 18*) when the leg extension 20a is fully extended from the housing 16a (see *FIGURE 18*). In this manner, the collar 58 prevents the leg extension 20a from being completely unscrewed from the housing (see *FIGURE 18*).

[0031] With reference again to *FIGURE 18*, as the leg extension 20a is drawn into the leg housing 16a, the tab 50 rides on (over) the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 and also rides in the portion 56 between the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2. The edges of the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 are sloped to cooperate with the oncoming edge of the tab 50 as the leg extension 20a is rotated into the insert 18a. More specifically, as the leg extension 20a is rotated into the insert 18a and the leg housing 16a, the tab 50 rides over one of the threaded portions 52a1, into the space 56 between the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2, and then over the other of the threaded portions 52a2. The sloped edges of the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2 ease the transition of the tab 50 from the space 56 between the threaded portions to the next threaded portion 52a1, 52a2. Consequently, a user

screwing the leg extension 20a into the insert 18a feels resistance as the tab 50 transitions from one of the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2, to the space 56 between the threaded portions, and then to the other of the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2.

- [0032] The leg extension 20a is secured in the insert 18a when the tab 50 is in the space 56 between the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2. The number of the indicators 54 exposed from the insert 18a represent a length of the leg extension 20a extending from the insert 18a.
- [0033] In another embodiment, the well defined by the tab 50 is sized to be seated over and surround the indicators 54 included on the leg extension 20a. More specifically, as the tab 50 encounters the first one of the indicators 54, the flexing portion 46 causes the first wall of the tab 50 to move over the indicator 54 (index). Then, as the user continues to turn the leg extension 20a, the indicator 54 becomes removably secured in the well between the two walls of the tab 50. The respective indicators 54 become secured in the tab 50 at predetermined (preset) positions in the insert 18a (and the leg housing 16a). Therefore, a length of the leg extension 20a extending from the leg housing 16a is related to the indicator 54 secured by the

tab 50. In other words, the user may determine the length of the leg extension 20a extending from the leg housing 16a by observing which one of the indicators 54 is secured by the tab 50. Then, the user may determine the length of the leg extension 20a extending from the leg housing 16a as a function of the indicator 54 secured by the tab 50.

[0034] When the indicator 54 is secured in the well defined by the tab 50, the user feels resistance when turning the leg extension 20a. By exerting enough force, the user can turn through the resistance so that the indicator 54 is disengaged from the tab 50 and the tab 50 begins riding over the next one of the threaded portions 52a1, 52a2. The increased resistance the user feels as the tab 50 encounters the indicators 54 provide a means of tactile feedback to the user regarding the amount of the leg extension 20a extending from the leg housing 16a. Furthermore, in one embodiment, the indicators 54 are numbers in numerical order that provide a means of visual feedback to the user regarding the amount of the leg extension 20a extending from the leg housing 16a.

[0035] It is expected that the respective indicators 54 on the various leg extensions 20a, 20b, 20c, 20d (see *FIGURE 1*) will be utilized by the user to adjust all of the legs to a common

height. For example, if the tabs 50 on the respective leg housings 16a, 16b, 16c, 16d are secured over a corresponding one of the indicators 54 on each of the leg extensions 20, the seat portion 12 will be substantially level if the chair 10 is placed on a level surface.

- [0036] Although only one of the leg housings 16a, inserts 18a, and extensions 20a have been illustrated, it is to be understood the other leg housings, inserts, and extensions are assembled in a similar manner.
- [0037] Each of the top portions 34a, 34b, 34c, 34d is shaped to fit within the respective housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d (see *FIGURE 3*) in a single orientation, thereby helping to assure correct assembly. Furthermore the top portions 34a, 34b, 34c, 34d are shaped as triangular lobes including straight, flat surfaces for distributing forces in the leg housings 16a, 16b, 16c, 16d and the leg extensions 20a, 20b, 20c, 20d, which are generated by a user moving on the seat portion 12 (see *FIGURE 1*). Because such forces are distributed over a relatively large area, internal stresses acting on the top portions 34a, 34b, 34c, 34d are reduced. The flat surfaces also reduce rocking when the user moves on the seat portion, thereby reinforcing the user's perception regarding the stability of the chair.

[0038] *FIGURE 21* illustrates another embodiment of the present invention. For ease of understanding this embodiment, like components are designated by like numerals with a primed (') suffix and new components are designated by new numerals. In this embodiment, a leg housing 60 includes an internally threaded wall 62. Therefore, the leg extension 20' screws directly into the leg housing 60. A locking mechanism 64 (tab) on the leg housing 60 interacts with the depression between threaded portions on the leg extension 20' as described above.

[0039] *FIGURE 22* illustrates another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, telescoping legs 70a, 70b, 70c, 70d made from a non-composite material (e.g., metal such as aluminum) include respective upper portions 72a, 72b, 72c, 72d having the triangular lobe shape for mating with the housing receiving portions 32a, 32b, 32c, 32d (see *FIGURE 3*).

[0040] While the present invention has been illustrated by the description of embodiments thereof, and while the embodiments have been described in considerable detail, it is not the intention of the applicants to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will readily ap-

pear to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention, in its broader aspects, is not limited to the specific details, the representative apparatus, and illustrative examples shown and described. Accordingly, departures may be made from such details without departing from the spirit or scope of the applicant's general inventive concept.